United Nations E/CN.6/2010/NGO/7

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
7 December 2009

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-fourth session
1-12 March 2010
Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session and its contribution to shaping a gender perspective in the realization of the Millennium Development Goals

Statement by the International Council of Women and the International Federation of Business and Professional Women, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2010/1.

09-63933 (E) 120110

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Statement

1. The International Council of Women and the International Federation of Business and Professional Women, known worldwide as BPW International, acknowledge and recognize the efforts and advocacy of civil society over the past 15 years, especially through women's organizations, in cooperation with Governments and agencies, to realize the objectives and goals of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. As organizations representing millions of women and girls worldwide, we do, however, bring our deep concern that many of the high ideals for the attainment of full human rights and fundamental freedoms as set out in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action have not yet been fully realized.

2. Fifteen years after the Fourth World Women's Conference, some progress has been made for some women. For millions of women and girls in many countries progress has, however, been excruciatingly slow. The ravages of war, national conflict and natural disaster have prevented progress on issues of gender and development. Such conditions have also contributed to the spread of HIV and AIDS, a scourge impacting more on women and children than on men.

3. Recently the global economic recession and changes in climate have reversed progress for the most vulnerable women. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that 5.1 million women will become unemployed in 2010 because of the economic downturn — in addition to the 32.6 million who are already without paid work.[1] Climate change will magnify a number of existing challenges to women, as women and children are 14 times more likely than men to be victims of natural disasters in societies where gender inequalities exist; this inequality further challenges the targets set in Millennium Development Goal 3.

4. Both the International Council of Women and the International Federation of Business and Professional Women are aware of the divide between the needs and aspirations of women and girls in underdeveloped as well as in more developed nations. For the achievement of the universal empowerment of women, it is critical that women who enjoy a better quality of life strive for improved outcomes for those who are more disadvantaged. Their struggle must be the struggle for all women and men, regardless of ethnicity, culture or belief.

5. The Beijing Declaration (para. 12) states that the empowerment and advancement of women guarantees both women and men the possibility of realizing their full potential in society and shaping their lives in accordance with their own aspirations. In 2010, many women and girls are denied this opportunity. Trafficking, violence, sexual abuse, unremitting poverty, homelessness and uncertain livelihoods perpetuate a life of want and discrimination for large numbers of women and girls.

6. Non-governmental organizations working for women's rights have been particularly active in advancing the strategic objectives and actions of the Beijing Platform. Projects and resources for more sustainable livelihoods, prevention of violence, education and training and improved health in local communities have been remarkably effective. The International Council of Women's development projects, with relatively small budgets, have had a profound effect in increasing family incomes through improved livestock, crop diversification, marketing of farm

[1] ILO, *Trends Econometric Models*, July 2009.

produce and training for the production of craft goods for sale. Literacy programmes, funding for educational resources and the provision of artificial limbs have also enhanced the lives of many women and their families. Hope has overcome despair in sustaining social development and social justice.

7. At the meeting of the General Assembly of the International Council of Women in Johannesburg in October 2009, approval was voiced for the greater awareness of gender, economic and social inequalities, acceptance of cultural diversity and growing support by Government and the media for women when they speak out against injustices. Concern was raised that the special needs of older women, disabled women and migrant women were still unmet. Emerging issues caused by the global financial recession and recent natural disasters have brought new challenges to the full empowerment of women. Accordingly, resolutions were adopted recognizing the role of women in caring for their families, the needs of widows, especially in conflict and post-conflict situations, the need for planning for gender mainstreaming by all Governments, for dialogue and tolerance in the process of peaceful conflict resolution, for education and training for human rights, for zero tolerance of rape and for recognition of the negative impacts of commercial sexualization of children.

8. The International Council of Women and the International Federation of Business and Professional Women fully support the Gender Equality Architecture Reform (GEAR) Campaign in demanding a high-level, fully funded United Nations gender entity for women. We see this new agency as a critical mechanism for the future advancement of women and girls. We applaud the decision of the General Assembly to go forward with the creation of this new entity through which, women's rights will finally be accorded the same status and legitimacy as other issues on the United Nations agenda.

9. In societies where the principles of Beijing, the safeguards of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals have been more fully recognized, there are a number of challenges. Violence against women and girls remains at an intolerably high level. Efforts to overcome domestic violence and the abuse of children have failed. Women's economic empowerment and development are essential to the realization of the goals of the Beijing Platform and the principles of the Convention.

10. On this thirtieth anniversary of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, BPW International and the International Council of Women stress the importance of the Convention to women and nations and call on all remaining Member and Observer States to ratify the Convention and its Optional Protocol, without any reservations, in order to help achieve the goal of a world where women and girls can live free from poverty, free from violence and free from discrimination, as envisioned in the Beijing Platform for Action.

11. Both developed and developing countries have made substantial progress in educating women and improving their health. In many developed countries, women now account for more than half of the college and university graduates, and many developing countries have dramatically reduced gender gaps in literacy and in the provision of primary and secondary education. There are still significant gaps in the

job opportunities for women and in the wages paid to women compared with their male counterparts; these gaps are even larger in most developing countries.[2]

12. During the fifty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women, two parallel sessions addressing the importance of gender budgeting and pay equity in the context of equal sharing of responsibilities were co-sponsored by Permanent Missions with the International Federation of Business and Professional Women. The President of the International Federation officially launched the "Equal pay day awareness campaign" during this time, calling on affiliates in over 90 countries to work with multiple stakeholders, including Governments, employers, civil society organizations and unions, in order to raise awareness of the persistent inequalities of the gender pay gap.

13. There is still very little accountability to women by Governments, corporations and individuals. Women must be included in systems of oversight at every level as legitimate participants in all spheres of public life, as leaders in government, businesses and the broader community. Despite the widespread establishment of national women's machineries, these are rarely well-resourced or politically supported and are therefore unable to influence government policy; women are consistently absent from key decision-making bodies influencing the distribution of resources in both public and private sectors. Gender-sensitive budgeting and policymaking are useful ways to measure progress that will support long-term economic growth as well as improve outcomes for women.

14. We call on Governments genuinely interested in strengthening women's rights and in promoting gender equality to look closely at finance and public spending in order to shed light on the question of how much of it goes to women and girls and how much to men and boys. A gender perspective must be integrated into every stage of a policy process in order to address social justice and to provide equal opportunities for women and men.

15. We note that although the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women does not specifically address budgets and funding, it implies that States have obligations in this regard by requiring all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women. It also requires that women be able to participate on equal terms with men in decision-making concerning budgets (see article 7).[3] Thus, where the failure of the State to allocate appropriate resources frustrates effective implementation of the Convention, it has failed to comply with its provisions.

16. General recommendation 6 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women determines that States should establish and/or strengthen effective national machinery, institutions and procedures at a high level of government and with adequate resources, commitment and authority to advise on the impact on women of all government policies; to monitor the situation of women comprehensively and to help formulate new policies and effectively carry out

[2] Keynote address by Her Excellency Chan Heng Chee, Ambassador of Singapore to the United States of America, at the fourteenth Women Leaders Network Meeting, Singapore, 4 August 2009.

[3] See Diane Elson, "Budgeting for women's rights, monitoring government budgets for compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, UNIFEM, 2006.

strategies and measures to eliminate discrimination. In other general recommendations, as well in recommendations to individual States, the Committee explicitly refers to the need to take budgetary measures in order to achieve gender equality (see, for example, General recommendation 24).

17. Gender budgeting, pay equity and shared responsibilities in caregiving are closely interdependent. Women's greater responsibilities in caregiving affect their access to equal pay; unequal pay leads to higher shares of women in care work, and gender imbalanced budgets tend to increase unpaid workloads. Strategies taking simultaneously into account equal sharing of responsibilities in caregiving, pay equity and gender-responsive budgeting are urgently needed.

18. In all but a few countries the gender pay gap has remained steady for the last decade, with basic pay for women more than 10 per cent below that of men. The differential is wider when women have attained higher qualifications. Women remain poorly represented in decision-making roles.

19. Women's abilities in peacemaking, in mitigation of climate change and in protection of sustainable environments will be critical to the future of the planet, and societies must be urged to recognize this fact and take appropriate action. Recognition of the needs of girls must be high on the agenda. Their future is women's future. Making sure girls are visible by investing in all aspects of their development will build stronger families and communities.

20. Only by political will, by reshaping all government policies to recognize and mainstream gender issues, and by developing mechanisms to ensure realization of the full potential of women alongside men, will the goals and intentions of the Beijing Platform for Action be fully realized. Let us keep moving forward, recognizing that progress for women is progress for all — and there is no turning back.

United Nations E/CN.6/2010/NGO/8

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Statement by the International Federation of Business and Professional Women, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

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* E/CN.6/2010/1.

09-63939 (E) 060110

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Statement

1. On the fifteenth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, the International Federation of Business and Professional Women reaffirms the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, including sections D, G and H, in which Governments committed to: eliminate violence against women; enhance the position and numbers of women in power and decision-making; and institute mechanisms for the advancement of women.

2. The International Federation of Business and Professional Women represents the interests of working women from over 90 countries across five continents and has been in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council since 1946. In 2010, the International Federation, known worldwide as BPW International, commemorates 80 years of advocating for gender equality and empowering women educationally, politically and economically in the societies in which they live.

Women in power and decision-making

3. As a leading women's organization in the twenty-first century, the International Federation develops the business and professional potential of women at all levels and realizes that this century calls for an equitable world that sees women and men sharing decision-making roles. Women now drive the world economy. They represent a majority of the talent pool and a majority of the market, making over 70 per cent of consumer goods purchasing decisions in most regions. Globally, they control about $20 trillion in annual consumer spending, and that figure could climb as high as $28 trillion in the next five years. Women's total yearly earnings of $13 trillion could reach $18 trillion in the same period. In aggregate, women represent a growth market more than twice as large as that of China and India combined. Governments and the private sector can no longer overlook the knowledge, experience and expertise of women in their countries.

4. Women represent 60 per cent of university graduates in Europe and North America, in excess of 50 per cent in the Asia Pacific and 70 per cent in the United Arab Emirates. However, despite the fact that in many developed countries women now account for more than half of college and university graduates, job opportunities for women and the wages paid to them still lag behind those of their male counterparts even in developed countries, and these gaps are even larger in most developing countries.[1]

5. Investing in women's leadership and participation has brought about economic and social transformation in many countries, and it has been shown that a more equitable gender balance in leadership yields better corporate performance.[2] Companies with more women in leadership have a 35 per cent higher return on equity; companies with more than three women on their corporate board have an 80 per cent higher return on equity. Quotas or other affirmative measures have been adopted to increase women's representation in political decision-making in a number of countries (including in some troubled countries), achieving in excess of

[1] Her Excellency Chan Heng Chee, Ambassador of Singapore to the United States of America, in her keynote address at the fourteenth Women Leaders Network Meeting, Singapore, 4 August 2009.

[2] 20-first, Waking up to Women-omics, http://www.20-first.com/.

30 per cent representation of women in national parliaments, but despite these advances, gender inequalities in leadership positions are still striking.

6. We call on Governments to recognize these inequalities and to accelerate progress in the placement of women in senior positions. We call on Governments to make a collective commitment to work with the private sector to increase the proportion of women in decision-making roles.

Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women: creation of a new United Nations gender entity

7. The International Federation supports and congratulates the General Assembly on the unanimously adopted landmark resolution on system-wide coherence of 14 September 2009 (General Assembly resolution 63/311), which will lead to the creation of a strong unified women's rights and gender equality entity led by an Under-Secretary-General.

8. For more than 50 years BPW International has worked with a wide range of partners to advance women's human rights, empower and help women access social and economic opportunities and assist countries in achieving societies that are free of violence, poverty and discrimination. The system as it now exists is simply not working well enough to deliver effective results to improve women's lives around the world. It urgently needs to be improved and strengthened.

9. Recognizing that the fifteenth anniversary of the historic Fourth World Conference on Women is approaching, with many of its promises still unfulfilled, BPW International demands that progress on forming the new gender entity be visible by the time of the review by the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in New York in March 2010. We urge Member States to agree without further delay on a proposal and come to agreement on outstanding issues such as the governance of the new entity. We urgently request that donor countries pledge substantial funding to enable the $1 billion target to be reached in order to support the proposed strong field operations that the entity must have if the promises made by Governments and the United Nations to deliver results for women on the ground are to be realized.

10. To date, the regional meetings of non-governmental organizations on the fifteenth anniversary of the Beijing Conference in Asia and the Pacific and in Europe and North America have affirmed the importance of creating system-wide coherence and a strong gender entity. The Commission on the Status of Women review in March is the time to take this process to the next stage.

Participation by non-governmental organizations in the process

11. BPW International brings 80 years of grass-roots experience in the field, working nationally, regionally and internationally to advance women's rights and improve their daily lives, building on the diverse voices of other women's non-governmental organizations. BPW International believes that heeding the experiences and voices of non-governmental organizations will be critical to the success and sustainability of the new women's entity.

12. Realizing the vital role that civil society organizations have always played in the work of the United Nations in the field of women's rights, we urge Member States and the Secretary-General to commit to the systematic and ongoing

participation of civil society, particularly women's organizations, at every stage of the process at global, regional, national and local levels, including in the governing board.

13. We stress that in order to deliver for women everywhere there must be systematic and meaningful participation of civil society representatives in the governance structure, as well as in the operations of the new gender entity. Recognizing the critical importance of tapping into the grass-roots expertise of non-governmental organizations, the "Gender Entity Architecture Reform (GEAR) Campaign" has proposed the creation of civil society advisory bodies at the global, regional and national levels, and has requested that a mechanism be developed for ongoing input from non-governmental organizations into the governance of the new gender entity.

Under-Secretary-General

14. We call on the Secretary-General to select a strong leader with significant stature, competence, credibility and experience in gender equality and women's human rights, including work at the global and country levels, as well as a track record in management and fund-raising. We ask that the selection of an Under-Secretary-General take place before the intergovernmental negotiations in March 2010, in accordance with the selection criteria developed by the GEAR Campaign for this post.

15. We further call on the leadership of the Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly and Member States to facilitate the intergovernmental process in an expeditious but effective manner in order to launch the new gender equality entity in 2010.

Violence against women

16. Violence against women has been recognized in the Beijing Platform for Action as "an obstacle to the achievement of the objectives of equality, development and peace".[3] Non-governmental organizations have urged the United Nations to recognize violence against women as a human rights violation and, as a result, Governments are introducing legislation dealing with domestic violence and establishing commissions to address violence against women.

17. The Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, together with its Optional Protocol, which empowers the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to hear complaints of rights violations brought by individuals, is one of the main human rights conventions of the United Nations and an invaluable tool for implementing the provisions of the Beijing Platform for eliminating violence against women. To date, 186 countries have ratified the Convention and 98 of these countries have ratified the Optional Protocol. The year 2010 marks the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention and the tenth anniversary of its Optional Protocol.

18. The Convention's thirtieth anniversary provides an occasion to celebrate its near universal ratification, as well as the recent progress that has been made at national levels to implement it and make true gains for women's and girls' rights on

[3] Beijing Platform for Action, strategic objective C.5.

a practical, everyday level. As a result of this Convention and the provisions of the Beijing Platform for Action, several countries now have national action plans to combat violence against women. In addition, laws and policies are being adopted to strengthen women's economic security and rights in such vital areas as decent employment and access to credit and markets. But there is more work to be done. The leadership that has already been demonstrated should provide a platform to support States that lack the knowledge, commitment or legal framework to fully implement the Convention within their jurisdictions.

19. BPW International therefore stresses the importance of the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women to women and nations on this thirtieth anniversary, calling on all Member and Observer States to ratify the Convention and its Optional Protocol without any reservations in order to help achieve the goal of a world free of violence against women, as envisioned in the Beijing Platform for Action.